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SERVICE

USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

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WHAT'S NEW

CURRENT SERIAL RECORDS

Breakfasts at School. A few lucky children--in one or two schools in each State--will soon be served breakfast at school. These will be youngsters whose families can't afford to feed them breakfast and those who ride long distances to school. It is part of a renewed effort to improve the nutrition of our Nation's children. Each breakfast will provide up to one-fourth of a child's daily food requirements. How big the breakfast will be depends upon the school's ability to help share costs and the children's needs. The pilot breakfast program, like the National School Lunch Program, is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in cooperation with local authorities.

Two New Virburnums. Here's something to watch for at your local nursery--two new varieties of virburnum that flower abundantly and are resistant to both diseases and insects. The virburnums, members of the honeysuckle family, were developed at the National Arboretum in Washington, D.C. Recently released to nurserymen for propagation, they should be available to home gardeners in a year or so. Look for the Mohawk and Cayuga. The Mohawk produces clusters of brilliant red buds that appear several weeks before the flowers begin to open. The flowers themselves are white with a pleasant, spicy aroma. The Cayuga has many pink bud clusters that open to white flowers. Although the flower clusters are small, there are so many of them it creates a mass flowering effect. Both the Mohawk and Cayuga varieties have showy orange-red leaves in the fall. They will grow as far north as Ithaca, N.Y.

The Tender Touch. You'll soon be seeing McIntosh apples cuddled in high-posted pulp trays at your supermarket. The trays give the tender Macs an easier ride to market. The high posts between each apple catch the weight of other cartons packed on top. As a result, consumers will get a lot of extra quality for only a little extra cost. The difference between bagging the apples and packaging them in post trays is only a cent and a half. The new tray-pack method was developed by marketing researchers at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.



NEW BOOKLETS

Making Basements Dry. Is springtime floodtime at your house? If you've got a leaky basement, melting snows and spring rains are bound to mean a basement full of water. Poor drainage, poor gutters and downspouts, a high subsurface water level--these are what cause the trouble. But what can you do about them? A new booklet published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture gives the answers. It also points out that the best remedy is prevention--at the time the house is built. How to construct a dry basement is fully explained. Initially printed as a Farmers Bulletin, this publication has become so popular that it now appears in the Home and Garden series. For a copy of "Making Basements Dry," HG-115, send 10 cents to the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

The Story of Pests. Every citizen-consumer should find something of interest in a new 24-page booklet, "Our Struggle Against Pests," put out by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This highly readable publication tells of man's battle to protect his farms and forests, homes and gardens from the onslaught of insects, diseases, weeds, and other pests, and how that battle is being won today with the aid of modern science and technology. The role of the government in guarding the public against possible pesticide hazards is also discussed. The booklet provides valuable information in a form that should appeal to a wide variety of clubs and other organizations. Quantities of this publication are available free for group distribution. Send a postcard to the Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. Ask for PA-772.

IN AND AROUND THE HOUSE

Warm Freezers. To keep food properly frozen--so that you get out the same top-quality product you put in--requires a freezer temperature no higher than 0° F. Some 30 to 40 percent of the home freezers checked recently by the U.S. Department of Agriculture were not this low. Temperatures in one or two registered as high as 30 degrees. You can check your freezer simply by propping a thermometer among the food. Record the temperature at various places in the freezer. When you find the warmest spot, keep the thermometer there and try to keep the temperature at this point close to zero at all times. It will require adjusting the control as the size of the load and the temperature of the room change.

Breath of Springtime. If you're one of those impatient souls who can't wait for spring--you can rush the season a bit by force-blooming shrubs inside your home. Flowering quince, forsythia, pussywillow and Thunberg spirea are easily forced into bloom in mid-winter. So are peach, apple, pear, plum and cherry. Here's how. Select stems heavy with buds. Remove bottom inch of bark from each stem and pound base with a hammer to allow good uptake of water. Place stems in warm water bath and allow to cool naturally to room temperature. Leave in water 24 hours, covering top with a plastic bag. Then place the branches in a vase of water to which a flower preservative has been added. Keep in sunlight at 65° to 75° F. Scrub base of branches often; replace water frequently. And expect blossoms in 2 or 3 weeks.

Cheers! A long, cool drink of well water--it's just as satisfying as ever. If the well is properly constructed, there's no need to worry about contamination by pesticides, says the U.S. Department of Agriculture. USDA scientists have tested hundreds of water samples from farm wells in all parts of the country. Nowhere did they find any pesticide residues.

RESEARCH IN ACTION

Peak into the Future. Home seamstresses may soon supply their families with home-sewed garments that have a built-in press, reports U.S. Department of Agriculture clothing specialist Virginia Britton. A leading sewing machine company plans to place curing ovens in its fabric centers so that women can bring in the items they have made and have them permanently pressed. Under investigation are several methods of applying this press, including the USDA-developed process in which finished garments are dipped in a solution, pressed and creased while damp, then cured.

Unfruitful Fruit Flies. Twenty million fruit flies, artificially reared and sterilized, have been released along the U.S.-Mexico border to mate with wild flies whose eggs will never hatch. This tricky maneuver, which cuts down considerably on the number of fruit flies hatched each year, is conducted jointly by the U.S. and Mexico Departments of Agriculture. It seeks to prevent infestations of the destructive fruit fly in this country. Before scientists developed the sterilization technique, annual insecticide treatments were applied to keep fruit flies out of the United States. This is the third year sterilized flies have been used.

Quality Control. There's nothing like making a good thing better. And that's what has happened to orange and grapefruit juice. It's now quality controlled by a new quick check of the peel oil present. It's the peel oil that gives the juice its flavor. If processors put too much of a squeeze on an orange or grapefruit, the juice becomes sharp and unpleasant. Too light a touch leaves it flat and uninteresting. To find the happy medium, U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists produced a quick check of the peel oil content. Many citrus processing plants are now using this procedure as a quality control.

Tenting Tonight? Tougher tents and awnings--that look better, too--that's the latest promise of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Actually, it's more than a promise; it's a reality. USDA scientists have developed a new simple method of applying mineral dyes to outdoor cotton fabrics to make them more weather resistant. The new process adds fungicides, mildew preventatives and wax for waterproofing to the fabric at the same time as the dyes. This new one-step process replaces a complicated four-step system. And it makes the fabrics tougher, too. Experimental fabrics retained 90 percent of their original strength after 15 months on weathering racks at the USDA New Orleans lab, while some commercial fabrics retained only 40 percent of their strength after a scant 12 months.

A Growing Problem. A breath of fresh air may be as invigorating to a plant as to a person. Yet with so much air pollution, especially around congested urban areas, many tender vegetables and feed crops have trouble breathing. They are being damaged by toxicants. Just how serious the problem is--and how it can be controlled--will soon be examined at the new Plant Air Pollution Laboratory now under construction at Beltsville, Md. Here, USDA scientists will concentrate on finding and developing plant varieties that are resistant to air pollutants. They will also explore the possibility of using antioxidants (chemicals that can be applied to the plant foliage) as a means of reducing pollution damage. Among the more easily damaged plants are tobacco, oats, alfalfa, petunias and beans. These will be used as test plants.

Roll Out the Egg. A roll of hard-boiled egg has been developed by Clemson University. Although not yet on the market, the product should prove to be a convenient food to have on hand, ideal for use in garnishing salads and casseroles.

FOOD FACTS

What's Up; What's Down. Still watching food prices? You'll be interested in these figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics which compare prices of selected items in October and again in November. Biggest price drops came in bacon (down 10 cents a pound) and grapefruit (7 cent less). Other items down from 1 to 5 cents were: steak; rib, rump and chuck roasts; pork chops, roasts and sausage; chicken; butter; bananas; oranges; canned pears; and eggs. The biggest up items--mainly, fresh vegetables. Green peppers were up almost 6 cents a pound, tomatoes close to 5 cents. The price of lettuce rose 3 cents a head; grapes rose 2 cents a pound; cucumbers, a cent and a half.

In the months ahead expect to see more pork offered as "specials" at your supermarket. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 8 to 10 percent more hogs will go to market during the first six months of 1967. Also, this year's orange crop is the largest on record, so look for a price drop in both fresh fruit and frozen concentrate. Grapefruit production, too, is up 10 percent over that of 1966. Poultry supplies will also be high in January and retail prices unusually attractive. And, at least through spring, expect to see lower egg prices. There are more hens and they're each laying more eggs. As for beef, supplies will remain plentiful and prices won't change much from current levels. It looks like there will be more fresh vegetables than last winter and probably they will be a little lower in price.

Coffee or Tea? Chances are 15 to 1 the answer will be coffee--and this despite the fact that coffee consumption is going down and tea consumption is trending upward. Coffee drinkers averaged 15 pounds per person in 1965 (down 3 pounds from 1947-49). The average for tea was only two-thirds of a pound (an ounce and a half more than in 1947-49).

Putting the Heat On. There's more flavor in maple sirup these days--thanks to a new processing method developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The secret lay in applying more heat to the sirup to bring out all its fine flavor. Heat is applied as the sirup passes through a tube heated with steam under high pressure. A change in pressure adjusts the temperature; a change in pumping rate controls the heating periods. For maple sirup lovers it means just one thing--a more flavorful product.

RURAL LOANS

Help. More than 236,000 low-income rural people have received about \$53 million in loans authorized by the Economic Opportunity Act and provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This money is used for income-producing purposes--to buy land, farming equipment and livestock, and to establish a long list of needed trades and services. Only incidental amounts of this money can be included for housing repairs. Low-income families who want to borrow money to make essential repairs to their homes can apply for credit under the Department's rural housing program. If no more than \$1,500 is required, the interest rate is 4 percent.

SERVICE is a monthly newsletter of consumer interest. It is designed for those who report to the individual consumer rather than for mass distribution. For information about items in this issue, write: Jeanne S. Park, Editor, SERVICE, Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., 20250.